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Hadassah

FLORETTE
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HADASSAH

Hadassah

*The Star of the
Persian Court*

BY

Florette Truesdell Miller



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Author's Preface

THE ancient Persian customs of dress, conduct, ceremony, repetitions in speech, applications of the titles of Deity to Kings, as—"King Divine," or Divine King "Sacred," etc., were in use at Xerxes' court. No language can exaggerate the old Oriental speech.

I have tried to set forth the purity of Esther's heart and life as the cause of her great influence with a heathen king, rather than her personal charms; and to show the superiority of her motive, over that of Vashti, which was womanly pride. I have made Mordecai unselfish in his position of non-conformist, obeying God's word in spirit and in letter.

Much has been said about the absence of any mention of God in the book of Esther, in the Bible. But it seems to me that God is in every circumstance of the whole account of both these wonderful people. The fact of its being written, as it must have been, right under the eyes of the jealous Persian officials and pass their censorship would sufficiently account for the suppression of that word. But the spirit is insuppressible.

Book I

Hadassah

The morning's blush dispelled the frowns of
 night,
And on the brow of heaven the conquering sun
Unfurled his banner and his rule proclaimed;
Began the measure of another day.
Stirred all to life within the palace walls,
And marked adown the rugged mountain's face,
The path of travelers who, with one accord,
As true as magnet to the star is drawn
Each to his liege obedient, wended on.
From Libya's wilds and Arab's seabeat sands,
From Egypt's plains and Lydia's distant shore,
Descended royal trains of camels white,
Or mettled horses from the north and west,
Across Euphrates' wave, from Western sea,
Which bore their freight of warriors, princes,
 lords
And courtiers of Great Xerxes, vassals sworn
Of Persia's King, the monarch of the world.
Now winding in, now out, of cavern deep,

HADASSAH

Up over hanging cliffs of glittering stone,
Then dropping down the steep defiles, with
 song,

With jest, or silence, as became each best,
They onward marched, with pomp and haughty
 pride,

Or sullen or subservient. Some scowled,
As stiff they sat with spear or lance upheld,
While taunting memory fed their thoughts with
 gall.

So on through many days, by devious ways,
By summons of their conqueror King com-
 pelled,

Surmounted e'en the last dark seam of rock,
While o'er yon mountain peaks the radiant orb
Projected cheerful light by countless rays
Which center in his glowing heart. And then
The weary caravans drew near. Halted.
The magic sight which burst upon their view
Enthralled their eyes and chained their hasten-
 ing steps.

There at their feet, a wide luxuriant plain
And great white Susa spread! A silver thread

HADASSAH

Broad Tigris lay, embraced by palm and vine.
There gleamed the pile of pillared stone which
marked

Proud Persia's noble capital, where stored
Her wealth, the spoils of bloody foreign wars.
Phœnicia, wise Chaldea, Babylon,
Had yielded tribute of their sumptuous hoards
To vaunt her grandeur, and submission show
To him who ruled by force a hundred lands.

Protected from behind by ranks of hills,
Unflinching face set toward the burning East,
Beyond the utmost image of the mind,
Stood forth, in glorious majesty and strength,
The palace of the king. Toward which all ways
And men were bent, obedient to his call,
Xerxes, hot pulsing heart of all the world.
Not then was war, but pleasure, his command.

That all his subjects should his glory know
He bade from six score provinces the chiefs,
With retinues, a banquet to partake
At Shushan. So his noble guests attend.

HADASSAH

The palace, firm on battlements of stone,
Four square, whose marble columns, dazzling
 white,
Stood, carved and wrought by every art of man,
Bewildering in height and in device,
Approached by lordly steps where stony guard
Of warriors bold, and lions, tireless stand.

Within, blue canopy from heaven caught,
Besprinkled o'er with twinkling silver stars.
White columns bore this roof of azure hue.
Hangings of Tyrian purple, white and green,
Subdued the sun's revealing light to soft,
Seductive harmony of shade and charm.

From swinging censers, Arab's incense burned,
Whose sacred breath Great Ormazd's nostrils
 met
With perfume, occult mixed, divinely rare.
Vases, myrrhine, blood-red sard, and crystal;
Gems from Caria's mines, Egypt's carven seats
Adorned the slab or stood on storied pave.
The king awaited, on his golden throne,
The abject homage of his subject lords.

HADASSAH

Before him prostrate to the ground they fell
When they his glorious majesty beheld.
While, he, the King, benignant welcome gave.
They then proceeded to the banquet hall.

Along the gilded tables couches stretched,
Of gold and silver, dressed with 'broideries
rich,

And softest cushions for the greatest guests,
For those of less degree were carpets spread
Upon the pictured pavement in the court
Of priceless stones, of red and white and black.
The awe-struck guests were led by courtly
slaves

To places mete to rank or state of each.
The Persian prince in flowing purple robe,
A chain of gold about his neck, and rings
And bracelets; saffron shoes upon his feet,
A golden fillet round his flowing locks;
Scented with fragrant unguent, spice and
myrrh,

Exquisite type of beauteous warrior race.
Swart Egyptian, his straight white robe of state
With golden edge and silken sash begirt,
Naked his long lean neck and sinewy arms.

HADASSAH

Rich Babylonian, in gorgeous gown
Bound round his girth by leather girdle broad.
Wise Chaldean, learned in heavenly lore,
His piercing eye long trained to read the stars.
Assyrian and Mede, renowned in war,
And pious bearded Jew in vestments white.

Ten thousand guests appointed to their place!

Highest, apart, reclined the monarch host
Upon his golden bed, half screened from sight
By purple web, which stretched from golden
post
To post, on linen cord, by silver rings,
Was drawn or draped, according to his will.

There sipped the King his royal Helbon wine.

Meanwhile he watches, as the guests below
Partake of viands choice, and choicer wines,
From golden plates and goblets all diverse,
And chased with story, myth, or bold design,
Adorned with gems for pleasure and for sight,
Which told which province each once claimed
as home.

HADASSAH

Rarest Scimian cups from distant mines,
And 'gainst his mandate, Jewish vessels, held
When mighty Cyrus spake by God's command,
Were forced to grace that pagan festal board.
"Let each guest his separate will obey,
Eat, drink, rest." Courtiers and slaves attend,
While graceful dancers whirl or slowly sway,
Or swiftly glide the sinuous, sensuous steps
With tinkling bells and bright seductive charm
Of music rung, or drawn from golden harp,
By skillful touch of Xerxes' gifted slaves;
Or songs from painted lips of throats renowned.

So passed the days, till many score were told;
Until the King forgot his state, drew nigh
And took the shameless feast among his guests,
Till, mad with power and with pleasure drunk,
As sickening climax of a wanton scene,
Boasted the beauty, grace and dazzling charms
Of Vashti, his and Persia's heavenly queen.
Yea more.—How fair she was to look upon
Themselves should see. He would an envoy
speed.

HADASSAH

Meanwhile, the virtuous queen, within her realm
Of women fair, from every clime and land,
With regal majesty dispensed her smiles
Within her palace, as became her well.
At her command was spread an equal feast
For wives and women of the illustrious guests;
That they, her hospitality should taste—
The lovely queen of Xerxes, King of Kings!

Her noble height was robed in filmy white
Of Median loom by broad Euphrates' wave,
Golden zones restrained her slender form,
And duteous homage her violet eyes command;
Penciled the lids with fragrant darkening dyes,
Her lips, nor cheeks no deeper unguent need.
A priceless crown adorned her sunlit hair,
Suspended stars dropped from her rosy ears,
And "Pearls from the Gulf," entwined her perfect neck.

Bright bands took loving measure of her arms,
And golden 'broidered shoes encased her feet.
A goddess' grace accompanied every step,
As maids and slaves conduct her to her place
Luxurious softness made,—a golden couch,

HADASSAH

Which, draped with costliest work by Syrian
wrought,
Stood high on carpet rich with toil of years.

The queens of subject nations and their trains,
With her, were honored to partake the feast,
Whose richness time nor people should surpass.

Those beauteous wives of Persia's conquered
kings

Wore each the apparel of her nation's choice.—
Flowery silks embossed with silver sheen,
Embroideries, stiff with gems from foreign
mines;

From the Mediterranean blue his life
The scaly murex yielded to the scene
The royal purple, color of the King!
Hycatanis' golden sands the crucible
Had passed,—transformed to cups for beauty's
lips

Were wrought and traced with pattern intricate,
To please the eye and gratify the taste.

HADASSAH

Varied the viands with strange fruits and
wines;
The price of peace and bought with liberty.

By slaves the royal guests were entertained,
The hours beguiled by story, song or dance.

Thus winged the hours, till on the seventh day,
Amidst the merry laughter, jest and wine,
As from its dungeon down behind the hills
The storm-cloud issues forth with shades and
gloom,
So o'er the revel dropped a pall of dread.

“A message from the King!” Proclaimed a
slave.

The hoary Seven who served before his face
Appeared, and prostrate fell before their queen.
“Speak, Mehuman, we will thy portent hear!”
“Our obeisance, O Vashti, heavenly queen,
O, royal consort of the king of men,
We humbly pray accept if happily
In thy pure eyes we may sweet favor find!”
“Thy commission. His sovereign wish unfold”—

HADASSAH

“Most gracious queen, His majesty commands
Thy matchless presence at his banquet, now!”

The daughter of proud Persia’s proudest
prince!

Chaste queen, that unpropitious message
heard,—

But doubted if her ears conveyed the truth.

To catch her words, her women breathless
stood.

And aching silence froze their joyous tongues;
While waves of color rose, as does the surf,
And higher mounts, till farthest sands are
reached,

So—drowned the rapturous beauty of her face
As by a flood, her sense was swept away.

Then from the lethargy her soul awoke!
Summoned the frightened forces of her mind
And angry pride the scepter seized. She spoke;
“Thus to the monarch of the world, our lord;
We must refuse to grant request so lewd!
Persian custom, if not our will, forbids.”

HADASSAH

In awe the reverent Seven withdrew.
In still suspense they to their liege proceed
With quaking hearts. They reasoned in themselves
If power divine could save their forfeit lives!
“Great Ormazd, temper his imperial wrath,”
They prayed, “when we unprosperous return!”

Wretched, but by ruthless duty spurred,
The haughty answer bore. Prostrate they fell
And mercy, unexpected and unhopèd,
In abject ashen terror, humbly plead.
He thrice commanded his rebellious queen,
And thrice was his improper order spurned!

What furies his imperious bosom rent!
Celestial monarch by his consort scorned!
In livid rage the King dismissed the feast,
And frowning aliens lingered in the gates
In ominous silence, or in muttered wrath.

His turbulent soul demanded gore!
But she from blood and carnage was secure.
What expedient then should meet such crime?

HADASSAH

The lot of Xerxes' slaves, what could compare?
Woe him whose duteous service he required!
For lo, the thwarted monarch thirsts for blood,
And vengeance mete was impotent to wreak
Upon the beauteous cause. So all beware!
For who can tell, by nature's face, the shape
She marks for next example of her wrath?
Can wisdom teach or prophecy construe
What trunk shall blister next in lightning's fire?
Can rock or ancient mighty tree, foresee,
Or know the crinkling shaft has singled him?
Nor does the favorite courtier of the King
Know who shall fall by his pernicious stroke
Of lurid anger's bolt, by passion flung.

As a deathlike hush and brazen sky pressage
On-rush of hurricane and swelling storm,
So, while within his breast the fury raged,
A deadly stillness filled the empty court.
While listening walls await his voice.

Thus spake the King. His minions servile fall;
"Before me bring the Seven wise in law."
The anxious sympathetic air lent speed,

HADASSAH

Lest their intemperate sovereign should demand

Their blood, unmindful of his subject's lives
When hot impatience drove the chariot
Of his will, not by cooler reason reigned.

Before his awful face the Seven appeared;
Next the King in honor, in knowledge more.
These tall, gray, haughty men of age and lore,
Their long rich robes of royal dye, high steps,
And lofty mien, their princely way proclaimed,
Though trembling slaves conduct and courtiers
bow,

Drew near with weight of dignity and care;
Who saw his face and counseled with the King.
“Oh live forever, King divine, we praise
Before all kings, thy glorious majesty!
And that thy power, and Persia's fame shall
wax,

Not wane, while yet the noiseless feet of time
Shall run their ceaseless round of fleeting years,
Would we the fruit of ripe experience
And tireless meditation offer thee,
Who by iniquity art oft pursued.

HADASSAH

We thee entreat thy godlike feet and throne
To fix in safety, that shall keep the realm
From inward turmoil free, and unperplexed
By tangling snares without; and to this end
We thy imperial summons now obey,
And hearken while thy royal wisdom speaks.”

“O what shall be to Vashti, Queen of heaven?
His spouse the King’s command hath set at
naught;
Hath boldly that denied which he decreed.”
The unchanging scroll unrolled. In vain they
searched.

“Such deed unpunished must not be. Behold,
What the kingdom’s fate, when consorts spurn
The mandates of their lords? The heavens
should fall
As soon as Persia should endure such shame!”
That royal culprit’s fate who could pronounce?
She, daughter too of Persia’s proudest prince
Among the Seven! Oh, heaven portend!
The fate of nations in the balance swayed,
Shall Vashti reign, and shall the King be
scorned?

HADASSAH

“O thou rebellious queen, forfeit thy crown!
O King, be thou revered.” So spake the wise.
With one accord the verdict made. “No more
O godlike King, shall she before thee come.
Speak thy high will and ratify this law,
Proposed and made to magnify the King!”

“Vashti, beauteous queen, consort of the crown,
No more thy face to see,—thy presence feel!”—

His signet loath descended on a law
So foul. But smarting pride blew bright the
flame
Of flickering, burning wrath which blazed
afresh.

The edict lived, and Vashti virtuous dwelt,
Removed from glory, but with honor crowned.
Persia lost a queen to spare a wanton king!

How fared he then? Was then the sting with-
drawn?

Like caged lion chafed his soul. No balm
Could soothe. A canker ate his royal heart,

HADASSAH

For grief too constant, kept his beauteous loss
A fevered memory to haunt his heart;
And his remorseful soul destruction cried.

He turned his murderous eyes to yon fair
Greece.

Toward Greece he wheeled his royal chariot,
manned

'Mid clamor, din, and music's cheer. The hosts,
Great columns made as numerous as the sands
That by the Western wave of blue are washed.
For Xerxes' blood was hot, his cruel heart
For conquest sought, to heal his amorous wound.
Alas poor king! Though called divine, how base.
The stroke and gesture of a king possessed,
But lacked the splendid measure of a man!
He naught foresaw of frustrate triumph's
stain

As his proud foes should sing to liberty!

While Xerxes on that Grecian war was bent
For glory, which might drown his rancorous
grief,

HADASSAH

His future pleasure and a balm was sought
Which should procure a queen—his wound
 assuage.

The Seven counselled. Messengers were sent,
In royal colors, out, to seek a maid,
Who should eclipse, as moon the dazzling sun,
Vashti's bright remembrance in the breast
Of Xerxes, and should seat on Persia's throne
A queen, to magnify the honor due
The King, and bring new lustre to the court.

Not vainly up and down the realm they sought
Upon this quest for beauty's varied palm,
Till scores of willing maidens wait the choice
Of him, the King of heaven, returned from war.

They filled the days augmenting nature's
 charms

By every art of slaves from many shores.
Each one could boast a servile train, that vied
To gain the favor of perchance a queen!
Each jealous mistress strove to far out-shine;—
And Susa fair a glittering pageant showed

HADASSAH

Whene'er the litters of these would-be queens
Went forth, each borne and served by liveried
slaves.

Book II

Hadassah

The shaggy brows of Susiana's hills
Are, by the morn's transforming smile,
Emerged from somber shadows, wooed by him
Who by the faithful edict of his rays
Prescribes the times, the seasons, days and
hours,

Which close enfold the destinies of men.
So he the parchment of his law unrolls,
Whereon it is inscribed, such deeds and such
Shall be performed when he, the king of day,
Permission grants by herald in the east,
And with his finger fraught with fate he wakes
The world. The master to his will, the slave
His weary task—the captive to his chains.

Unhappy they, twice, thrice unhappy some—
Conquerors, then conquered by him who knew
No will but his—Cyrus the Great, renowned.
Since Cyrus passed, by other kings controlled
Till Xerxes flashed upon the world as king.

So Babylon, within her gates constrained
Her captives, she herself no less a slave.

HADASSAH

Thus some, from far Judea, brought in chains,
Of royal blood from far Jerusalem
The best and noblest of a chosen race,
By Great Jehovah set apart to be
Peculiar people, blest and taught of Him;
But who transgressed his law, His word forgot.
Those Babylon's might conveyed and planted
there

Beside the Chebar's wave, exiles to dwell,
While others from among their best, select,
Were swept to Susa by disaster's flood.
So, scattered through a foreign land and far,
Diverse, was colonized that blasted race.
By heathen ruled, who not Jehovah knew;
To mourn in bitter long captivity.
And such their plight when Xerxes claimed the
throne,
And with his iron hand began to reign.

Six score provinces, with Babylon, groaned
And sweat beneath great Persia's cruel yoke
And galling tribute drained their golden
hoards.

Amid the mournful train, with grief oppressed,

HADASSAH

Walked one revered, beloved, among the twelve
Who sought to mend the broken ship of state,
Afloat upon the waters of a sea
Unknown, and guide into some harbor where
A chart and compass might be found to point
It toward a peaceful, though a foreign shore
His wisdom like a beacon stood, a rock
Of safety to the tempest-tossed. At length
They rested and from memory brought the law;
And Mordecai the Jew, the son of Kish,
And tribe of Benjamin, of royal line,
With others counseled and some order gained.
And homes and loves, like flowers among the
tombs,
In the uncongenial soil took root and grew.

Tall, grand, lonely Mordecai! Sentinel.
Over that remnant of his nation guard.
When, left unmothered on that unkind spot,
A girl-child looked mute innocence and trust,
With sweetness subtly mixed, into his eyes
And holy warmth into his aching heart.
His kinswoman,—in length, three span not
more!

HADASSAH

Into his humble house that princess came.
He gained a daughter, she a father found.
Hadassah, myrtle, fragrant sweet and white—
A blossom fresh, and passing fair her name.
Into that barren home she grew in grace
And beauty. Light and benediction brought.
She softened his stern heart to tender love.
The austere soul of Mordecai a comrade
Found of a finer charm than others knew;
For not of outward form, but of the mind
And spirit, which only his own eyes beheld,
As nourished at his knee upon the Word
Of God, she waxed in wisdom from on high.

Thus in meditation, mixed with music
Of her fathers, with voice and lyre or harp,
She made of her seclusion—paradise.
Her simple daily tasks her happiness.
To sprinkle smiles and brightness, courage,
 hope,
Among the lowly, grieving, soul-sick ones,
As God himself, upon the grass and shrub,
The jewelled sunshine or the gentle rain.
Content to ease a burden, cheer a heart

HADASSAH

Oppressed, or wipe the tears from sorrow's
eyes.

Thus, like the myrtle of her name, she spread
Of her pure life on all around fair bloom;
And all within the brief circumference
Of her restricted sphere were nobler grown
For having crossed the orbit of her path.

And Mordecai upon her marvelous face
In wonder gazed. He questioned.—Is it she
Is sent by Him His people to unchain?
A vague prophetic awe within him stirred,
Which newly kindled in his soul a hope.

But as a radiant morn sometimes is shook
By thunders' shock, or by the stormy cloud
Is over-cast with sudden gloom, more dark
By contrast with the early peaceful day,
So broke the blare and clang upon the ear
Of that remote but dauntless captive band.
The trumpet blast which sounded the approach
From Susa's palace of a courtier forth
Who bore the pregnant roll with royal seal
That one Hadassah, marked with beauty rare,

HADASSAH

A noble virgin dwelling in the bounds
Of Susa's fertile plain, should gather her,
With others fair, to Shushan's shining halls,
And there appear to please the King and win
His favor; yoking rosy pleasure so
To duty's car and feeding appetite
That he should choose a queen for Persia's
throne.

Remorseless fear the roses slew upon
Her cheeks, and lilies pale their places knew.

Her glorious eyes were dilate with the thoughts
And terrors struggling in her maiden breast.
Shut from her wonted joys, to pleasure lost,
Within the lustful palace of the King!
What chilling horrors did she bring to mind,
Disgusting orgies and revolting rites.
Is there no rescue, no reprieve from doom
To her so awful, yet by others sought?
Oh baleful edict by the princes framed
Which bore the stamp of Xerxes' signet ring!
Which stony grief nor melting tears could
move.

HADASSAH

But veiled and fainting she was borne away;
Another link in beauty's varied chain.
But as the day the night's unlike, so she
To them. None knew her nation or her race.

“Jehovah, hast no pity on such woe?”
Hadassah, lend a listening ear.—“Behold!
In the hand of the Lord is the heart of
The King. As rivers of water He turneth,
Turneth He *him* wheresoever He will!”
Lo, to her heart an angel whispered, “Peace,”
And calmed the troubled waters of her soul.
So she, unto His hand, relinquished all.
True courage to the vacate throne returned,
Whence quaking fear had chased that rightful
heir.

So was the spotless myrtle put to bloom
In alien soil, repugnant and remote
E'en from the garden of her captive home,
By ruthless fancy of a ruthless king.
Within the palace, which but mocked her life,
Her modest mien, her gentleness and grace,

HADASSAH

Amazed paternal Hegai and won
From his hard pagan heart respect most rare,
Who kept the palace and those wayward ruled.

And lest that wondrous flower should soil and
fade

In atmosphere by vulgar poison charged,
Unto the highest place among the fair
Of that long rank of painted beauties bold
He sought a place removed. And for her needs
Selected from the maids a chosen seven
To do her bidding and enhance her charms;
To teach the new found goddess courtly ways
And speech, as should a future queen become.

So dragged the days in occupations new,
Diverse, but full of dull monotony.
Her joy, the knowledge of the watchful eye
Of Great Jehovah,—and of Mordecai,
Her only parent, who before the gate
Walked daily, desolate, to know her fate.

Wild naked runners vexed the heavy air
With pregnant cry, the dull unwatchful ear

HADASSAH

Of waiting Susa, that by vigils worn
Had, stiff and drowsy, nigh forgot her lord,
Unwholesome smote and roused. "*Xerxes the
King!*"

That potent proclamation stirred to life
The sluggard city and the idle court;
Infused new quickened blood to ravished veins.

The seasons thrice had round their circuit run,
The seed-time thrice had brought rich harvest
home,

Since Persia's monarch forth had swept his
horde

To war; to gorge his pride and chain fair
Greece

By fetters crimson-stained in freedom's blood;
Knew not that violence nor wrath is strong,
But monstrous, when against the right arrayed.

The dauntless sun by a myriad smiling beams
Mocked the invictorious King, who rode
In sullen silence, scowling at his fate.
His gilded chariot followed by a train,—

HADASSAH

The wretched remnant, spared by valorous
Greece,—

The shores of Persia's realm again to see.
What should temper that proud oppressor's
soul?

How could he meet the misery of defeat?
But deeper plunge to hide his nauseous shame,
In deeper shame of pleasure's foul abyss?

Nor were those wanting who, to ease the hour,
Occasion seized advancement to attain.

Ingenious minions, who, to sweet the gall,
Commingled lauds with chafing curses low,
Which oft too close to the royal ear were
breathed,

But which their honeyed flattery would drown.
Could such assuage a sorrowing *hero's* mind?
Could such relieve an angry warrior's soul?

Within the palace the insatiate King
Among his minions singled from the rest
One fairly formed but filled with foul deceit,
Whose figure promised dignity and truth,
Fulfilled, a soul of meanest base contour.

HADASSAH

And vanity upon his spacious brow
Her tinsel crown of pride had lightly bound.
Insinuating speech and unctuous show
Of deepest reverence deceived the King,
Seeming courtly grace gained him every wish.

Thus Xerxes' steps were tangled in a web
Invisible, to catch his reckless feet!
And Haman, fawning lord, bowed smiling down
In worship at the feet of him he served
Obsequious, to the ground. Raised by him,
By Xerxes King of men, to wear his ring;
The first in empire, next to him supreme.

Thus rose Hammedatha's artful son
Whose ancient fore-sire ruled as Amalek's
King,
Accursed of God, Jehovah of the Jews!

And Haman, for his blinded lord, procured
Some surcease for his smitten, rankling pride,
In gorgeous ceremony, false as brief;
Of satisfaction, from his slavish flock
Of minions, vermin of a rotten court
Who fed and fattened on each other's fall.

HADASSAH

And shrewd, contemptuous Hegai advanced
His aspirants for imperial choice,
The brilliant perfumed bloom of Persia's fair—
Voluptuous, languid, 'sinuating,
False, artificial patterns of the times,
Unknown to honor, and to virtue new;
Till scores the unsuccessful contest shared,
But Xerxes' throne still mourned an absent
 queen;
While gluttoned the King with ambrosial
 draughts.

Joys were found to spurn his memories grim,
Consummate, monstrous, varied and extreme,
To still the grotesque spirits of his soul
Which in his muffled ears for justice cried,
Nor would be hushed by clamors of the court.

At length, as when the blazing sun is quenched
By cooling shade or shower, Hadassah came
Before that dread and awful King of men
With fear, pale comrade of her timid breast,
But trusting that strange Providence which led
And kept her fainting heart and held her steps.

HADASSAH

No aid she sought to magnify her charms;
As simple child of nature, wisdom showed;
True dignity her dress, and purity
Her ornament, a peerless, perfect gem.

When he beheld her grace, almost divine
Because her heart was pure, he felt a thrill,
As if a spirit from a purer world,
Ethereal, had entered and approached.
And when, her queenly head upraised, he saw
Her face, he wondered if a vision passed,
When she answering, fixed her gentle gaze
Upon his piercing eyes, the clear white light
Of truth shone there, which looked and saw
 beyond,
Like a bright, high-shining, heavenly star.

And love, a stranger, yet thrice welcome guest,
His dark heart opened, and possessed his soul.
He claimed her, not the plaything of an hour,
But recognized in her a subtle strength
Where he could fix reliance in a need.

He spoke, and she with gracious words replied,
Her voice made music in his empty heart;

HADASSAH

Her wisdom awed, her sweetness charmed, his
sense.

Quick favor toward that wondrous being sprang.
For her spotless virtue, reverence strove
And mastery gained against low passion's
sway.

He chose her for his queen. *Esther, Star!*
And she, bewildered, wondered why should he,
That monarch she so feared, to her be kind.
And kneeling, humbly high Jehovah thanked.

Xerxes a proclamation made. A feast
To Esther, Queen of Persia—of the world!

And ere the circling year had made its round
Since from her lowly station she was torn,
That gentle captive maid, though princess born,
On proud Persia's glittering throne was set,
While Xerxes, King of kings, upon her head
By radiant locks adorned, had placed a crown,
And beauteous Esther reigned a mighty queen.
Proclaimed, enscribed and sealed upon the roll
As sovereign; gracious, virtuous and wise.

HADASSAH

And Mordecai saw closed within the walls,
Of Xerxes' pagan palace all his hopes.
His heart congealed; became a sacred tomb.

Afflicted and bereft before the gate
He stood. Hadassah was no more. Her *name*,
With Jewish charm, was wrested from his lips
By Xerxes' whim, to Esther changed by *him*,
The fancy of an amorous king to guide!
From its natural channel life was turned,
And whither, wherefore, none dared ask—or
 know.

So, day by day, did Mordecai, outside
The gate keep wakeful vigil for a word of her
He loved. To him her yearning heart escaped,
In messages, like softly cooing doves
Swept hovering to his sorrowing soul.

And she beheld with unsealed eyes, the depths
Of love that dwelt unfathomed heretofore
Within his stern exterior of flesh.
As gems within the bosom of the earth
Repose unknown, till mighty quake or shock

HADASSAH

Bursts her great heart and shows its hidden
wealth,

So she had known the shadow of his life
Walled by virtue, upright. Not sad nor glad.
A man serene, calm, imperturbable.
She wot not that within him glowed a love
Unspeakable, unselfish, and for her.

And so it was, and came to pass one day,
He sat, and many more, that he might catch
The rumors as they flew, and hear how fared
The queen—if still in favor with her lord;
Or, if his eyes might gladden with the sight
Of Esther's golden litter shimmering borne.
Though closely draped with royal veil, to know
She passed, the gloomy day enriched and
cheered,
As by the sun the sometimes shrouded earth.

There reached the fine-strung ear of Mordecai,
So sensitive of danger to his child,
A voice which, wafted on the sunburnt air,
Hot with conspiracy, by anger bred,
Or foul ambition's greed or fouler lust,

HADASSAH

Betrayed a plot by Bigthan and his mate
To vacate Persia's throne; to slay the King.

Chill horror crept along his veins, lest they
Should execute their base conceit to rid
By traitorous blow the groaning earth of him,—
And Esther's life, all innocent, should fall
Beneath the brutal stroke too broad for one
Hurled headlong down, by passion's monstrous
hate.

Then Mordecai, by desperate need's demand
Made bold, revealed by faithful messenger
To Esther's ear, and she unto the King,
The tragic plot, in which himself was set
The central gory figure, struck by death.

The King, with visage veiled in purple wrath,
His council called and inquisition made,
Which black assurance brought of ripened plan,
That fit to pluck, was dropping to the hands
Of Xerxes' would-be executioners
Bigthan, Teresh and their brigand band.

HADASSAH

And they by his inexorable hand,
With all their deadly machinations thwart,
Were hurled, unrighteous, to eternity.

And on the record of the Persian roll
Was writ and sealed that deed of Mordecai,
Which told his loyalty, that saved the King.

Book III

Hadassah

There flashed from out the night's dark shivering gloom ;

Which often wrapped its folds about the King,
A *star*, clear, unwavering and undimmed,
To which his eyes could unsuspecting turn
And read the truth, though half misunderstood.
His pagan heart was softened and impressed

By every glimpse of her consistent life.
He to his heart decreed more oft to see
More frequent her persuasive voice to hear,
Whose music, unfamiliar, struck new chords
Within his darkened being's unlocked halls ;
And stirred to thought and lofty purpose pure,
That started 'wake a vague, and new desire—
Disgust for passion's pleasures and the train
Of base ambitions, jealousies and joys,
Which made the measure meat and drink of
them

Who fawned and flattered and seduced his court.

Oh ! would proud Xerxes had obeyed that call,
Had burst the toils of custom which enthralled !

HADASSAH

Had led his people upward to the light!
But Xerxes, smiling Haman ever found
Seductive, to caress his pride, at hand
To lull disturbing conscience back to sleep.

Diversion, wild and sensual, contrived,
To fill his hours and separate the queen,
Whose purifying influence he felt;
Until the King, fresh honors to confer
Upon his false o'er crowned favorite's head,
Uncommon homage claimed and edict made
That all the world should bow the knee and fall
Before the lordly Haman when he rode,
Astride the royal charger, envied forth
In purple robe and golden tunic dressed,
Fit climax to his misapportioned love,
In peerless self conceit he sat supreme.
The King of men his tool, *his will* was king!
Could aught his joy augment, or pride surpass?
Sat Haman on that dizzy height secure?

Over the servile minions of the King
Complacently he swept his pompous gaze,

HADASSAH

Nor recked what fierce, rebellious thoughts he
stirred

Within the kneeling thousands whom he bent.

Exalted Haman, honored and obeyed!

Yet all availed him naught, for at the gate,

Erect, stood one, a granite shaft, unmoved

Amongst the shifting, unsubstantial sands.

Nay, more. That bitterness should brim his cup

And scald his vanity with subtle steam,

Mordecai, who bowed not, nor reverence did,

'Twas told him was a hated Jew, a prince

Of Judah's line, from old Jerusalem.

Proud Haman! None gave him timely warning,

Nor tuned his ear to catch a lower note,—

That Xerxes' matchless queen was Judah's
child,

Whose double parent was stern Mordecai!

For close he hid the nation of the queen,

Locked jealously within his faithful breast,

Lest she be stung by hatred of her race.

And daily as he stood within the gate,

Demanded they, the servants of the prince,

HADASSAH

Why the imperial edict he transgressed,
Why he the King's commandment set at naught?

“Hath not Jehovah-nissi solemn bade
Remembrance of the foes be blotted out
From under Heaven? They, who smote the
weak
And feeble and thy little ones who fell,
Undone, when Israel out from Egypt came,
From cruel bondage worn by Pharaoh's yoke?
Shall I, however menaced, e'er forget?
Shall I such heinous wrongs, I, Mordecai,
To Haman bow? To *him*, an Amalekite?
No, no! So shall to me, yea more, be done
When I transgress that righteous curse of
God!”

He spoke, and wrapped him in his cloak of grief.
Superior sorrows swelled his aching heart,
And various feelings stirred his loyal breast.

Vain Haman, to the fateful future blind!

And when his servants, fearful, in the gate
Expostulation made to Mordecai,

HADASSAH

Who hearkened not, they made the matter
known

To Haman, whether it would stand his wrath,
Or the rebellious Jew should be subdued.
To lay his potent hand on one foul Jew
He scorned, but to obliterate the race,
To make that slight against his august self
Sufficient cause to shed a *nation's* blood,
Would proper meet his gross, prodigious claim.

Then Haman to the King; before him bowed,
Low obeisance made. “O live forever,
King divine! Sacred Ruler of men’s minds,
Wise arbiter of nations’ destinies.”

His treacherous face was creased with feinted
care.

His carriage bore, apparent, hidden load
Of anxious burden he would gladly bare,—
Or bury in his heart’s inmost recess;
To spare his worshipped sovereign, his one joy.

So spake his every pose and attitude
Which held his visage false, and graceful shape,

HADASSAH

Which now perplexed and now was gay, as if
Some utmost import struggled 'gainst the hour.

The various colors of his favorite's moods
The King observed, and, ever quick to read
The faces of his oft-pretended friends,
Demanded what the essence of his thoughts.

“Behold, most gracious King, there is abroad,
Wide scattered among our own, a people strange
And vicious, mixed, whose fiery evil blood
Doth poison rank distill through all the veins
Of empire; more insidious deadly flow
It bears than some swift rush of fevered brain.
Dark danger lurks beneath fair courtesy.

“They not Ormazd worship, but their alien God,
With forms unknown and incantations wild.
Oft against thine own decrees, deep mischief
work,
And fill with fear of Him the minds of men.
This nation, wide dispersed throughout our
realm,
These Jews, much gold unlawfully possess,

HADASSAH

Despite thy laws, and divers of their own
Ordain and serve; not thine revere nor keep.”

“Therefore, it is against thy profit more
To suffer them, but that they should be de-
stroyed,

And that thy glory be supreme, O King,
And magnified, I will unto thy hands
For them that have in charge this business, give
And pay ten thousand silver talents, weighed
And counted, to the treasure of the King—”

Thus in devotion spake the ardent lord
And humbly bowed his stately head and stood—
Quick snatched the King his trenchant ring,
Into the itching palm of Haman thrust—

And spoke the King: “The silver be to thee,
The people too be thine, these hateful Jews—
Do unto them as seemeth good to thee.”

Then with a fatal pen the royal scribes
Were bid to frame a mandate which should
bear

HADASSAH

The imperial seal and Xerxes' name,
Which should among the Medes and Persians
stand,
Whose laws remain untarnished and unchanged
Until the moon no longer marks the night
Nor hides its purer glory from the day.

Thus was the writing made upon the day
Prescribed by Haman,—by the King decreed,
And sent to all his provinces and tongues
The potent words unto their governors
To kill and cause to perish every Jew—
Young men and old, women and infants new!
Possess their gold and take their spoil for prey.

Then out from Shushan dashed the flying posts
On sinewy steeds from Arab's plains.

From city walled, to mountain tribe they bore
That message fraught with woe and sped by
fate,
Which rung the warning knell of coming doom,
And withering ashes choked the heart of hope.

HADASSAH

Where peaceful shepherds fed their passive
flocks.

And murderous Scythians lurked for blood,
Where greedy foes the industrious Jews
Devoured with covetous eyes, that law was
heard

With evil joy, the promise of their lust.

Oh hapless Jews! Oh wretched that they were!
No shelter from the bursting fiery flood.
The heavens were brass, Jehovah closed his ear.
Transgressions past, the door of mercy shut.

Revive disheartened Jews! His ear is quick,
Nor shortened is his arm. Repent! Obey!

The King, all careless of his awful deed,
Sat down content within his palace hall
To eat, and drink his merry Helbon vine
With Haman; pangless prince, degenerate—
A fit companion bought and paid with blood.
While Susa swayed by sorrow's wave,
Its motion set by Haman's jealous rage
At one solemn unsubservient Jew!

HADASSAH

When Mordecai, who to Jehovah true
But insubordinate to Israel's foe,
Perceived what fruit his valorous deed had
borne

The wailing heard and saw the tearing locks
That insuppressive smote the hostile air
And sprinkled o'er the pavement dropping
blood,

But could not slack a particle the speed,
Nor stay the whirling wheel that vengeance set.
He rent his clothes and with loud bitter cries
Flung lifeless ashes on his hoary hair
And in the harsh uncomely sackcloth wrapped
His form;—the utmost emblem of despair.

He strode among the weeping, wailing throng.
His visage spake, as did his voice, of prayer.
The vulgar hushed, the faithful he inspired.

Before the palace gate, for none might enter
there

In aught but pleasure's garb, no thought but joy
Profane the precincts of the monarch's court,
He stayed his melancholy, wandering steps.

HADASSAH

His feet took root, his soul sought succour
there.

So came Queen Esther's maids and chamber-
lains,

And Mordecai's behavior told, in fear;
For oft their gracious mistress had vouchsafed
Kind favor toward her stately ancient friend.

She sent fair garments him to clothe, and hid
The haunting phantoms which disturbed her
mind,

What dire calamity o'er hung their fate,—
What subtile omen bore from him to her.
For tale of sorrow, danger or alarm
His very vestments among her people spoke
The mute, emphatic language of despair.
Uncommon terror seized her anxious heart
When he unused, returned the happier robes.

She summoned Hatach, faithfulest and fleet,
Commandment gave to haste to Mordecai,
Convey and bring the substance of the cause
Of his peculiar conduct, fraught and filled
With anguished warning of accomplished ill.

HADASSAH

Then forth obedient Hatach sought her will,
Anew to homeward lead the calm content
Which wandered, driven from her troubled
 breast,
To ease the desolation of its flight;—
And seek the unknown moment of her parent's
 sign.

So Mordecai made answer to the queen,
Uncovered to her eyes the bloody plot
Conceived by Haman; to blot out all their race.
Nay more: he to her hand the writing sent
Wherein was fixed and sealed the thirteenth
 day
Of Adar's month to see performance made
Of every sinister particular!

And glittering silver 'gainst the balance
 weighed
Of innocence, of virtue, yea of life,—
Securing-bond to hatred's strong decree,
Seductive lure to lustful Xerxes' thirst
For gold, his inglorious greed to sate,
Which spurred the hand that penned the dire-
 ful words.

HADASSAH

“Go you in, Oh Esther, to your lord,
And supplication for thy people make.
Request that they perchance may live—not die
Unwholesome slaughter to deface his reign.”

Thus poured that most unwelcome, woeful
wail

And cry of death into her waiting ear;
And she beheld with unsealed vision, clear,
The certain, sure, unutterable end
Of her beloved people. Whose race was quit
Unfinished. Whose black night had hid the day
Before the last bright smile of sunset died.

But well she knew her hastening doom she urged
If from her golden prison bars she broke,
And against all Persian law, attained his ear
Whose guarded presence shone with blade and
spear

Of warriors fierce, and ripe for blood or strife,
Forbade the attempt of uninvited guest;
The forfeit life, the one prevailing law,
Taught and applied to women and to men.

HADASSAH

Whoever ventured to the inner court,
Except perchance the golden scepter be
Outstretched by his unstable royal hand,
By Xerxes, unaccounted either just or kind,
If he be not called. "And no voice has me
Before his presence haled these thirty days,"
She said. Her gentle eyes were drowned in
tears.

That grievous answer reached to Mordecai,
While rose and fell upon his quickened sense
The rising swell and ebbing tide of grief,
As restless waves forever to and fro,
Upon unfeeling sands roll up and down.

So he the royal messenger recalled,
Commanded: "Tell thy gentle queen: Beware
If thou thy help withhold! Deliverence
Shall rise from other and more fruitful source,
And he who serves the day the blessing wins.
But that shall not preserve *thee* undestroyed;
Thou and thy father's house alive, though thou
Be hid within the palace of the King.
But, O my child, who shall gainsay that thou
For such a time as this art brought unto

HADASSAH

The kingdom, thus Jehovah's will to work!
To save from death, restore and make alive
Thy nation that is sold to Satan's joy.
Cannot the maker of men's minds their wrath
To blessing turn unto His faithful ones?
However dark or deep or wide their plan,
Let no dark doubt become a stumbling-block
Unto thy feet, that shod with faith, art sure.
Remember but His promises, which yet
Are unfulfilled, which wait thy fervent will."

"Arise! Put on thy royal robe, O Queen,—
Put trust in Heaven, and unhindered go.
Press through the unholy growth of sword and
axe
To him, thy husband, and the King of men!"

Unhappy queen! Before her, death's grim face,
Hideous monster, in which guise he comes,
By vulgar slaughter or by courtier's thrust.
But even death shall lose its bitterest sting,
And invictorious swallow up its prey,
When unappalled his victim lifts a face
Unpallid, beautiful, and unafraid!"

HADASSAH

So Esther, when the crushing fleshly fear
And tremor, was overcome by Him—
With raised, uplifted head and shining face,
Though dimmed her eyes and flushed her cheeks
By rush of weeping, while the storm had raged
Within her soul, betwixt herself and right,
But now calm and serene as sky of blue
After the tempest is enchained again,
Her answer, framed in pearls of love, pure
 gems,
Transmitted to unyielding Mordecai.

“I will obey Jehovah’s will and thine.
Before the King I will unbidden go—
And not according to his will, appear.
And—if I perish, I shall perish well!”

“Go, gather thou the faithful who are found
In Shushan, and together fast ye, all;
As will my maidens in the palace halls
With me, hushed vigil keep, nor meat nor drink
Partake until Jehovah to my soul
His wisdom grants to undertake the task
By His appointment cast unto my lot.”

HADASSAH

And she withdrew from revelling and strife
Apart, and strict communion held alone
With Him, to study diligent the task
He had ordained, and gain undoubtful mind.

Thrice the sun sent forth his glorious rays
Along the path of day to woo her feet,
And thrice the gentle moon had touched the
earth

With sheen of silver by her swinging wand,
Before sweet Esther, Xerxes' stricken spouse
Stepped from solitude—his radiant queen,
Apparelled and adorned to meet her lord.

Her brilliant eyes and wondrous face and form
Seemed with marvelous beauty newly crowned;
For, nourished from His sacred store, her soul
Sustained her flesh, fed by food from Heaven.

Piteous pallor with his finger wrote
The faithful story on the hollow cheeks
Of maidens who with her had kept the fast.

Book IV

Hadassah

Inclosed within a pillared court, unrolled
A dazzling scene, unrivalled, to the eye,
Which with exquisite blow the senses shocked,
Of shape, conceit, and symmetry contrived.

Upon a floor o'er-writ with myth and lore
In precious stones, unlike in shape and shade,
A maze of gold and silver columns shone,
That bore a glittering metal archéd sky,
Chased by Cimian cunning craft and art
With sunny glow and softer evening light,
Which, like the heavens at night, its moon and
stars,

The sun himself is helpless to out-shine;
And sinks from sight, but leaves a golden track
To blend its glory with the whiter way.

The golden walls which hid the stony frame
Were rich with pictured exploits done by gods,
And warriors, heroes, chariots and steeds.

Seen through the forest, thick with jewelled
trunks,
A royal purple cloud hung beneath the roof,

HADASSAH

To designate the sacred spot where he,
Upon his lion-footed throne of gold
Upraised on fluted spheres, whose golden hulk
And golden stool were firm on feet of bulls,
Sat Persia's King, Achemenian Prince.

The purple candys graced his noble shape,
Of flowing silk, down to his golden feet.
His nether limbs were clothed in richest red
Of Media's loom, to vulgar web unknown;
A twisted golden collar clasped his throat.
Rare gems engirt his arms and sheathed his
sword,
While on his hands and in his ears were stones—
The price of blood, from foreign captive
mines.—
And priceless perfumes wreathed the tempered
air.

A presence of such vast magnificence,
So awe-inspiring, taxed the boldest heart
To venture, when his coming but obeyed
The monarch's bidding and the scepter's sway,
Whose language, eloquent, spoke life—or death.

HADASSAH

A multitude of vying minions strove
Their sovereign's will to read and pleasure do.

A bristling bulwark rose of spear and axe,
E'en from the outer gate unto his feet,
Of warriors trained, Assyrian and Scyth,
His person to protect both night and day;
Quick execution to perform, of him
Who dared intrude, by what necessity,
Uncalled—the presence of their King.

The sun unheeding lit the gorgeous scene;
But tenderer shone upon the humblest flower
Which hidden, bloomed without the blazoned
 walls,
Fair duty did to beautify some spot,
Unseen by king or courtier, but by Him
Who notes the spirit of His creatures well.

So plunged the world in golden bath, but shut
From blest refreshment and uncleansed were
 those
Who, within that marvelous prison dwelt,
That cynosure, the palace of the King.

HADASSAH

Where feebly filtered through that net of
wealth,
Thin streams of light from its unnatural use,
Took shapes; and figures showed of ball and
ring,
Of lion fierce, and bull, on wall or pave,
Fit emblems of Great Persia's heavy power
And rude insignia of her ruthless strength.
It searched among the women's palace halls
Till Esther's heart a benediction felt.
As its heavenly radiance she beheld
Which marked that fateful morning of her race.

Two nearest maidens called, and bade to bear
Her train, and one to graceful lean upon.
And thus in proper dignity, which well
Her state became as Xerxes' crownéd Queen,
Proceeded undismayed, to see her lord.

The King upon his throne, surveyed his court.
His eagle eye traversed its precincts wide;
Returned, and down the guarded highway sped,
Which outward led e'en to the open door;—

HADASSAH

Where challenged by a vision fair, it stopped,
Transfixed with wonder and by beauty charmed.
For in the inmost court, within the space,
His bright enchanting queen—his star of light
Shone amid the unwholesome vicious gloom.

Before his gaze she bent, with utmost grace,
Her head, which bore the crown his hand had
set.

Spell-bound what various passions swayed the
thoughts

Of bristling guard, of jealous courtier or—
Mayhap a friend. While Xerxes in his breast
Felt fond desire, the victor over wrath,
Outstretched the potent scepter. She drew
nigh,

With swaying step as if by magic borne,
And lightly touched the kind indulgent wood
As prone she knelt in deep humility
And gratitude to God, and to the King.

She rose, uplifted by her royal spouse,
Exquisite, pure, with yearning in her eyes.

HADASSAH

His heart responded. "What wilt thou, Esther,
Queen? It shall be done, to half my kingdom.
What is thy request? It shall be given thee."
But, she not yet the portent of her act
Could hazard, not her purpose big construe.
The dreadful splendor every fiber shook
Of mind and nerve. She guidance sought of
Heaven.

Then Esther answered: "If it please the King,
If now it seemeth good unto my lord,
Pray let the King and Haman come this day
Unto the banquet which is now prepared."

Then to his servant, bade the King: "Go thou
And Haman call, Queen Esther's will obey."

So Xerxes and beloved Haman came
Unto the banquet Esther had prepared.
And as he sipped the sacred cup he said:
"What is thy petition, beauteous queen,
And what is thy request? It shall be done,
To half the empire; it shall be performed."

HADASSAH

Then Esther said: "If in thy sight, O King,
Thy favor I have found, O let, I pray
The King and Haman yet to-morrow come
My banquet to partake, and I will do
As saith my lord." For still her heart re-
frained,
More strength required, more wisdom yet, to
speak.

Once more the darkness saw her bitterness,
As she Jehovah pleaded not in vain.

Forth from the banquet Haman strode,
And glad. But when he Mordecai beheld,
Old, gray, impassive Jew, within the gate,
Who bowed him not nor moved, but silent sat,
'Gainst him was he with indignation filled.

But Xerxes' favorite refrained himself
Till he was come unto his house, then called
His wife, unstable Zeresh, and his friends,
To soothe his fretted spleen with honeyed words
And fond sweet flatteries, in bland sunshine
Or creatures fawning, faithless as himself.

HADASSAH

The glory of his riches he unrolled,
Also, wherein the King promoted *him*
Above the royal princes of the realm.
Yea moreover, no other man was called
To Esther's banquet but his liege and him.
Spoke Haman: "And to-morrow I am bid
Again to her, also with the King."
And swelling exultation shook his frame.
"Yet *all this* avails me naught, while I see
Mordecai the Jew sitting at the gate."

Ignoble Haman, puffed with preposterous pride
And sallow jealousy his vitals gnawed.

Then urged the clamorous Zeresh, and the rest,
"Since in thy hand the King has put the Jews
To kill and slay, but hasten thou the day
Appointed, cast by lot and punish this
Hoar and haughty, on a gallows high
Within thy court, a wholesome warning, seen
By Shushan, of the fate of him who dares
Ignore Great Haman, whom shall all obey."

Which words his ears so tickled that he smiled
A venomous assent, and bade be raised

HADASSAH

A shaft of fifty cubits height to stand
All ready to fulfilment of his hate,
The bitter fruit of his prodigious plan,
Which naught should sweeten as it riper grew,
When he should on the morrow speak his wish
That Mordecai should perish, to the King
First and early, then merrily go in
To drink Queen Esther's banquet with fair
 grace.

The monstrous thing much pleased proud
 Haman's soul.

And as the gruesome music made by tool
Upon the hideous frame that sounded loud
The doom of Mordecai, the laggard steps
Of time withheld the leaps of Haman's lust
For crime, till morning her permission gave.

That dark portentous night could not the King
Possess himself of sleep. Upon his bed
Beneath the branches of a golden tree,
Which lacey patterns wove, and of a vine
Whose brilliant fruit was rich with precious
 gems,

HADASSAH

He tossed, and unsuccessful wooed the god,
That wanton played beyond e'en Xerxes' reach.
Nor could his singing girls nor dancers charm,
But weary with the round of follies stale
He summoned forth a scribe to bring the roll
Of record, the chronicles of Persia,
To read its valorous annals while he waked.

And written it was found that Mordecai
The foul conspiracy of Bigthan wrecked,
And of his band, who kept the royal doors,
Who sought in rancorous vengeance to destroy
the King.

“What sufficient honor has been done
To him, this Mordecai, my faithful subject
What readest thou upon the sacred roll?”
His servant answered: “There is nothing
writ.”

Before the glowing sun, the stars had fled
Nor his compelling march disputed sway,
And brilliant pageants spread unto his view,

HADASSAH

For sparkling jewels dressed each tree and
blade

To celebrate the victory of day.

His reign began. "Who stands within the
court?"

The King, alert, inquired. "Lo Haman, sire,"

The servant said, "awaits his lord's command."

For eager Haman came to speak the King

To hang upon his gallows, Mordecai.

"Let him draw nigh." So artful Haman came,
With ceremony fair and evil mind.

"What shall be done to him, the man the King
Delighteth to honor? What sayest thou
prince?"

"In whom is lodged the King's delight and
whom
Would he exalt but me?" Spake Haman's
heart.

But with his lips: "Let royal garments, rich
With sacred unction from thyself, be brought.
And thy proud courser, stiff with golden gear.

HADASSAH

A royal crown be set upon his head,
His envied hulk in that apparel dressed,
On the immortal stallion set, and led
By one of Persia's proudest prince's hand,
Through Susa's streets 'twixt kneeling multi-
tudes,
Who shall proclaim, 'So doth the King to him,
The man, his soul delighteth to honor!' "

So Haman said; and with false meekness bowed.
"Thy thought is noble and thy words are sage.
Go *thou*, and likewise do, *to Mordecai*.
Let nothing thee escape, that thou hast said;
For thus shall be conferred a late reward,
Too long by cunning and by venom hid.
Be *thou*, my trusted minister, the man
To show to Shushan his integrity."

Then did he all according to his words.
The steed and the apparel, and arrayed
That hateful Mordecai, that Jew, and went
Before him through the streets proclaiming
loud:

HADASSAH

“So doth the King to him whom he delights
To honor.” And led him back unto the gate.

Then went consummate Haman to his house,
With covered head, confounded and ashamed.
To mourn unseen his bleeding pride, and curse
Subverted vengeance, which had laughed to
scorn

His sleek complaisance and his high estate.

And when his Zeresh saw his wretchedness,
Intolerable and untrue seemed all
His fallen glory. Then his wise men said:
“If Mordecai, before whom thou hast fallen
Be as thou sayest, a Jew, then surely art
Thou fallen indeed, and none shall stay!”

While yet his stream of misery flowed full,
Which from an ever swelling fountain poured,
A messenger arrived in haste to bring
Before Queen Esther, Haman to her feast.

The adoring King to Esther said: “Thrice
Have I urged thee what thy petition is,

HADASSAH

By thy bewitching veil of modesty
The wish, that hidden lies within thy breast.
What is thy request? It shall be performed,
For thy sweet purity can naught construe
Of evil's darkness, but thine eyes the light."

Queen Esther summoned all her allied force
Of brain and soul, and flung into her words
And face the anguished answer from her heart:
"If I have favor found in thy sweet sight,
If it please the King, let my *life* be given
Me, at my petition, and my people
At my request, for we are foully sold
To be destroyed—I and my people all
All to be slain and perish from the earth!"

A wave of horror swept the mighty King
From off the shores of reason and of thought.
His pulses stopped, and paralyzed his sense.

"Had we but been to grievous bondage sold,
In bitter silence I had held my tongue.
Although, the damage done to thee, O King,
The enemy could never countervail."

HADASSAH

“Who is the man, and where, that durst presume

Within his heart to do this monstrous thing?”

So spake the King. His visage by the fire
That lit the furnace of his wrath burned white;
His lofty form uprisen from his couch.

His thirst for vengeance choked his parchéd
throat,

Nor could his heart his wild demands fulfil
How e’er it vainly struggled to obey.

“The adversary, and our enemy,

Is wicked Haman, who partakes

My feast and mocks his sovereign with his
smiles.”

The King withdrew into the garden cool
Of Esther’s palace, in the plane-tree’s shade,
To whet to edge the weapons of his mind,
To mete sufficient justice to such crime.
No common price could settle that account,
For Haman’s guilt was treachery distilled
And Xerxes’ soul abhorred the liar’s art.

HADASSAH

Doubtful and dismayed, with loosening joints,
Stood Haman up to plead his fallen cause
With Esther, whose sore wounds had been his
joy.

His malicious hulk he cowering flung
Down at her feet, in abject cowardice,
And wept unseemly tears by terror wrung.

The King beheld in wrathful scorn, and signed
His waiting slaves, who covered Haman's face
With execution's blinding-sheet of doom,
In heavy silence and bore him to his death.
Harbonah, Xerxes' faithful prince who dared
To counsel with the King, unveiled his eyes
To Haman's gallows, consummation bold,
The sinister design, anterior shaft,
Which he had reared for Mordecai the Jew.
The foaming King sarcastic sentence gave.
"Let him adorn the tree his malice grew.
Hang *him* thereon, its own most proper fruit."

He who for the hapless Jews had dugged a pit,
With both his wicked feet had plunged, himself.

HADASSAH

So they hanged Haman on the gallows built
For Mordecai, of fifty cubits height,
While jeering multitudes with wagging heads
Grinned at his writhing agony and shame.
And then became the King's wrath pacified.
He gave the house of Haman to his Queen,
For he knew not her soul repelled the gift,
Of Haman's treachery and blood, the price.
Proud Pagan Xerxes wrought but justice grim,
Nor ever knew that *love*, not wrath is strong,
That Esther sought in love to save the Jews,
Nor aught against their enemy invoked.
Thus greatest happiness was mixed with pain.

Then Mordecai was brought before the King.
The tender tie which close entwined the Queen
Revealed and honored, that parental bond!

The King drew off the ring that late had graced
The faithless Haman's hand. To Mordecai
Gave custody, and Haman's house became
The house of him who spurned the Amalekite.

Once more with graceful port the Queen ad-
vanced

HADASSAH

And weeping cast herself at Xerxes' feet.
Once more the scepter spoke with pregnant
 voice,
And Esther lived. She stood before her lord
In melting, supplicating grief. She plead:
"If favor yet I find, and if the King
Be pleased: Oh! magnify thy patience still
To grant yet further all my broad request.
How can I endure to see destruction fall
On all my kindred, innocent of guilt?
Write ye, O, King what cannot be reversed,
And with thy potent ring the writing seal,
To cure among the Jews the deadly wound
By Haman's cruel arrows swiftly sped.
Thy soul, the works of peace cannot disdain,
But shed quick healing o'er his poisoned sting."
"Three flying months already have consumed
Since hatred's breath the wholesome air defiled,
To shed sure death upon the helpless Jews."

She spoke a language of unequalled charm,
For in fathomless depths of love 'twas shaped,
The stedfast purpose of Jehovah's will.
Once more, but now in mercy, were the scribes

HADASSAH

Forth summoned to appear and write the words
Of fate, a nation's destiny to mend.

Perplexing was the work, for minds, though
sage,

Whose years had seen the birth and death of
kings

And empires, and the fall of kingdoms old
And strong, by Persia's unrelenting stroke
Uprooted, as the mighty sycamore
Before the hurricane's mad rush succumbs,
Had writ triumphant slaughter, bloody deed
Of carnage, rigor, torment and distress.

But chronicle of mercy to indite
Unto a race subdued, they ne'er were bade.
But now, behold, doth Persia's King command:

"Write ye according to the words decreed
By *Mordecai*, henceforth my minister
And also for the Jews, what liketh him."

Then was it written that upon that day
By Haman cast for their destruction due
The Jews should be in every place set free,

HADASSAH

And stand against their foes and for their lives,
Which were by Haman ordered to consume
Them, man and store, for e'en the King could
not

Reverse the law by Medes and Persian's made;
Which once promulgate firm forever stood.
So was the writing done, and signed and sealed
And sent by riders swift on horse or mule
Or royal dromedary for the Jews,
Unto the rulers of the provinces
Which stretched away from Arabia, to the sea
Which western lay, to Ethiopia dark,
According to their language and their speech.

And joy and gladness spread o'er ashes dead
Of stricken hearts, and life from death arose.
So was the vicious hate of Haman turned.
Who durst molest the Jews, himself was prey.

Because the fame of Mordecai waxed great
Did fear and dread fall on the heathen hordes
Whose expectation swam in gore and spoil,
Fulfilled grim disappointment's empty cup,
Or death to them that, tempted by the prize

HADASSAH

And eager to torment, rebelled the law
Which lent deliverance to the captive Jews.

From out the palace went forth Mordecai
In royal purple and fine linen clothed,
A golden crown upon his head.

Shushan rejoiced, and ran with gladness full.

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